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*Coluccio Saluti Essay Writing Competition*

### **Open Doors**

As I sit here, pen poised, ready to recount my weeks in Florence I am met with an expected loss of where to begin. But the more I think about this fact the more it comforts me. It means my time here has been complex, hard to articulate, and therefore extremely rewarding. There are layers to this city, both in its people and physical nature, which make simplicity near impossible. If someone can retell their story in full, with ease and grace, they have not truly experienced this city, for it is a confusing place that stops and starts you, invites and expels you, all behind a façade of ancient stone. Coherency is not a quality Florence nurtures for her inhabitants and long time visitors.

Forgive me if this reads as a negative commentary on the city, that is not the case, nor my intention. It is instead a desire to commit her nature to paper so that she may be identified with the permanence of ink (as though such a thing could ever be possible). If this is also written with a degree of fervor it is because it seems that is how one discovers Florence, quickly and only in fleeting glimpses. When you try to write about Florence it remains just as enigmatic on paper as in real life. It is only possible to be truthfully descriptive in inspired bursts that leave as quickly as they come. This is not unlike the way in which you might wander down any number of streets within the city and wonder about the life that goes on behind the numerous, solid doors that line the street. These doors stand between formidable sized stones and you might catch yourself lost in a daydream about who or what might be on the other side. Always unexpected and on the periphery of your gaze, you spot someone leaving. Just as they are about to close that last of two (always two) doors, you see the beautiful courtyard within the exterior

walls or perhaps the stairwell that leads up from the street into their removed lives. With a heavy click it is done. As soon as it came it is now gone, you are on the street still, that much is the same but now rather than before, a bit wiser than the tourist ten paces in front of you.

The key is to not let this experience go to your head, not to let it inflate your “travelers ego”, there is still so much to discover. Everyday is a potential learning experience when it comes to Florence, a simple bus ride turns into cultural anthropology if you have the patience to let it. Watch the faces of those around you and you will start to understand the individuals who make up the city as a whole. An old woman who steps onto the bus in the simplest of clothes with her arms laden with groceries, her face as guarded and stoic as the renaissance portraits that inhabit this place. Indeed she even seems to be of that time, but when a seat is offered up for her amidst an overly crowded rush hour bus, that stone face transforms itself into a smile that invites you in, for a second.

Vignettes like these are what make for an original experience, a piece of true authenticity. Like anything else they last for mere moments but when added up the sum total is an experience unique to only you; this has been a glimpse of mine, two pages of that open door. I came to Florence to discover myself all at once, in a singular event. I realized life hardly happens in momentous occasions, it is more likely to be the culmination of the days that shapes identity, an ongoing process. My life now bears resemblance to the city itself in this respect; I catch glimpses of who I am, and who I can be, momentary but immensely inspiring.